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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: GOI ARRESTS STOKE DIYALA SUNNIS' SENSE OF
DISENFRANCHISEMENT

REF: BAGHDAD 49

Classified By: PRT Diyala Leader George White for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This is a PRT Diyala reporting cable.

12. (C) SUMMARY: Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) operations in Diyala province have exhibited a consistent pattern of sectarian bias. The Government of Iraq (GOI) has launched a number of security operations in Diyala ostensibly to combat Al-Qa'ida in Iraq, but apparently targeting the Sunni political establishment while largely ignoring their Shi'a counterparts. The Sunni political leadership in Diyala argues that the Shi'a-dominated GOI in Baghdad is using these tactics to influence the results of the upcoming provincial elections. If the Sunnis in Diyala perceive that their political voice has been stymied, some may revert to insurgency. END SUMMARY.

13. (C) The pattern of ISF targeting of Diyala's Sunni political establishment began to emerge in the summer of 12008. On July 31, Iraqi Army (IA) Captain Husham Al Mamahdawi was arrested and detained at the Balad Ruz ICID in Diyala. During his detention, according to Diyala Deputy Governor Auwf Rahomy, Husham was forced to sign a confession and testimony implicating 55 Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP--a Sunni political party) members in acts of terrorism, including Deputy Governor Auwf and Muqdadiah municipality's Qaimmaqam ("Mayor") Najam Al Khozi. Upon hearing of the detention of Captain Husham, Coalition Forces (CF) raided the Iraqi Police (IP) station, released Husham, and treated him for injuries consistent with torture.

14. (SBU) In August 2008, the IA launched "Operation Benevolent Diyala" in the province. During the course of this operation, approximately 1,600 people were detained, the vast majority of them Sunni. A number of prominent members of the province's Sunni political leadership were among those arrested, prompting complaints from Sunnis that the GOI was pursuing sectarian political objectives in these operations rather than counterinsurgency.

15. (SBU) One of the most prominent Sunni politicians detained during Operation Benevolent Diyala was Dr. Hussein Abdulmajeed Al-Zubaidi. Hussein was a member of the Provincial Council (PC), former leader of the Sons of Iraq (SOI) in Diyala, and a likely candidate for governor. His arrest has inflamed the Sunni population, particularly because he has been denied access to legal counsel, medical personnel and his family. His continued detention has become a point around which the Sunnis of Diyala have rallied. Moreover, recent rumors have spread throughout the Sunni community in Diyala that Hussein has received the death penalty. (NOTE: While false, the rumors were widely believed by Diyala Sunnis. This has reinforced the public perception that his continued detention and ISF counter-terrorism operations in the province are purely political in nature. END NOTE).

¶6. (C) In December 2008, the death of former SOI leader Sheikh Bashir while in GOI custody (apparently due to torture), and the IA roll-up of other Sunni leaders once again exacerbated tensions in the province. The most recent operation involved the arrest and detention of at least 45 Sunnis (not a single Shi'a among them), including top police officers in the Muqdadiyah and Baqubah areas. The most prominent of those sought was Muqdadiyah Qaimmaqam (mayor) Najam Al-Khozi. Najam evaded arrest and remains in hiding.

¶7. (C) Deputy Governor Auwf and Assistant Governor Hafith Abdul Aziz have complained to the PRT that the GOI is attempting to intimidate and oppress the Sunni political leadership and population in advance of the provincial elections, scheduled for January 31. They allege that these events demonstrate a pattern of anti-Sunni behavior, as the Shi'a-dominated government of Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki attempts to consolidate its power by using force to undermine political rivals.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) Should the Sunni parties fail to win a large majority of seats in the upcoming provincial elections in Diyala, they will likely blame the GOI's military operations and Sunni arrests as the primary cause. In this case, Sunni leaders will consider the elections and the resulting Provincial Government equally illegitimate. This will dishearten Sunnis and diminish their faith in the democratic process. Feeling disenfranchised from the democratic process, some could

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return to violence in Diyala. END COMMENT.
CROCKER